

STAND-UP COMEDY AS TEXT: A RE-READING OF ATUNYOTA AKPOBOME (ALIBABA)'S SELECTED PERFORMANCES

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Abstract

Stand-up comedy as a performance art can trace its inception and influences from oratory, classical Greek drama, speech, and different oral and comic traditions all around the world. Stand-up comedy is a type of comedy where the performer, also known as a stand-up comedian, gets up on stage and engages with the audience directly by telling jokes, often humorous stories or observations. Atunyota Alleluya Akpobome (Ali Baba), the pioneer of new stand-up comedy in Nigeria, helped this generation of comedians enjoy a financial boom and social recognition. Scholars have given ample attention to the business, aesthetics, and history of stand-up comedy, but textual analysis of stand-up comedy is rare. The form has received more attention than the contents of the art created by its numerous practitioners. The central methodology of this paper is textual analysis. This study uses content and thematic analysis to examine the concept of text in oral performances, focusing on selected Ali Baba jokes from his rich repertoire of live comedy performances as case studies. This paper reports that Ali Baba skillfully incorporates cultural references, vernacular expressions, and colloquialisms into his jokes. Furthermore, Ali Baba's comedy goes beyond the realm of amusement, often carrying underlying social commentary and political satire. In celebrating Nigeria's cultural heritage and diversity, Ali Baba's comedy serves as a reflection of the country's collective identity and shared experiences, fostering a connection with his audience that transcends mere entertainment.

Keywords: Ali Baba, Stand-up comedy, Text, Textuality, Oral Performance

Introduction

The performing arts encompass acting, dance, music, acrobatics, storytelling, juggling, magic, busking, stand-up comedy, jazz, and martial arts (Koniji, 1991). The performing arts are manifested in various dramatic genres, including comedy, tragicomedy, and tragedy. They have historically engaged in and persist in expressing themselves through various dramatic arts subgenres, including mime, melodrama, satire, and burlesque. Additional genres include sitcom, slapstick, and parody.

Ali Baba's emergence in the Nigerian stand-up comedy landscape transformed the genre's structure and substance, prompting a redefinition of societal understanding and interpretation. Ali Baba's stand-up comedy adheres to the tenets of utilitarianism. It encompasses intellectual, ethical, psycho-spiritual, and socio-political concepts. As an art form, stand-up comedy is a group effort, and its value depends on how well the audience connects with the material. Ali Baba played a pivotal role in the emergence of contemporary stand-up comedy in Nigeria, transforming the art

into a significant instrument for national economic development, youth empowerment, and national recognition.

Rao argues that even with stand-up comedy's growing popularity, there is still a shortage of academic research on the topic as compared to other performing disciplines like dance, theatre, and music. He posits that the reason behind this lack of attention from academics could be the low regard stand-up comedy holds as a traditional art form. The organization, content, and aesthetics of the performance receive little scholarly attention. It is significant, therefore, that stand-up comedy has lately been studied in Nigeria as a new kind of live performance by Nwankwo (2014) and Idowu (2017).

There is no denying the fact that Atunyota Alleluya Akpobome (Ali Baba) is a pioneer of this movement, having popularized stand-up comedy in Nigeria. He has informally continued to train Stand-up comedians in the country and have significantly provided budding comedians with platforms to showcase their talents. Therefore, an examination of the evolution, growth, and popularization of stand-up comedy in Nigeria will be incomplete without a reference to Akpobome's (Ali Baba) contributions. Consequently, this study analyses selected texts from the repertoire of Akpobome's (Ali Baba) stand-up comedy. Scholars have studied stand-up comedy from gender discourse (Osisanwo and Ilesanmi, 2020), religion (Imo, 2018), culture (Adesina and Filani, 2018; Ambrose, 2022), historical perspectives (Nwankwo, 2015, and Aguoru, 2022), performer's style (Nwankwo, 2015, and Idowu, 2023), and business management angles (Odutola, 2013), etc. However, little academic attention has been paid to the textual content of stand-up comedy.

Methodology

The central methodology for this work is textual analysis. This methodology can be confounding insofar as there are different definitions of 'text'. Text here refers primarily to the oral and linguistic components of Ali Baba's comedic art. These components are then subjected to content and thematic analysis. This design is based on maximum variation sampling of his materials across his appearances in several concerts. The selected concerts are his hallmark January 1st Concerts and Lafup's Circus 2016 show. The rationale for this process is to select jokes from shows where he is the headliner and a show where he was featured in an array of other stand-up comedians.

Comedy: A Traditional and Varied Art Form.

The etymology of "comedy" is rooted in the Greek verb "*komoidia*", which means "to revel". Bieber and Dasylyva trace its origin to the celebration of the earth (Idowu, 2017). Historically, comedy is traced to the revelries inspired by the celebration of the earth's fecundity. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle also claims that comedy began as creativity and that, like tragedy, it began with phallic melodies. Dasylyva (2014:15), in his explanation of comedy, asserts that comedy is a generic subset of drama. According to him, comedy addresses experiences that are deemed more appropriate than dubious and is primarily concerned with how man interacts with society. For him, humour is a subset of drama that differs according to its "topicality, mode, technique, and quality." To comprehend the notion of comedy in its broader context, he distinguishes between two types of comedy: high comedy and low comedy.

According to Dasylya, the above categories gave birth to comedy of manners, comedy of humours and intrigue comedy. Comedy as a genre of drama is often viewed from the perspective of plays that end happily and frequently conclude with celebrations. Idowu (2017:25), while supporting this view, opines that comedy goes beyond this common perspective. He observes that comedy, in its process of eliciting amusement, also performs pedagogical functions. He buttresses his opinion by quoting Holman:

Comedy is a form of dramatic literature designed to amuse and often to correct or instruct through ridicule. It generally ends happily. To achieve its effects, it exposes incongruity, absurdity, and foolishness, and its treatment of characters frequently has elements of exaggeration and caricature.

Robert, while reviewing the beginning of comedy, submits that comedy started as “an improvised entertainment that combined satirical skits, bawdy jokes, erotic singing, dancing and uninhibited revelry” (33). This, according to him, is a submission made by Aristotle. From all indications, tragedy (as a dramatic piece) was more produced than comedy. Aristophanes, who was described by Robert as “a playwright of brilliantly funny wit and savagely penetrating political acumen” (35), was known to have written a set of comedies from the late 5th century B.C. However, he could only set the guideline and not the structure, as done by Aristotle in the case of tragedy, giving the essential components of tragedy. Aristophanes’ comedy involved what Robert summed up as “interpersonal conflicts, topical issues, witty dialogue, physical buffoonery and sexual playfulness” (37).

Generally, the characters in comedy are drawn from real human experiences, often portrayed in a larger-than-life manner, and they face everyday life challenges that the audience is familiar with. Horace, a renowned Roman poet, according to Robert (2000:17), “coined the term '*utile dulce*', or 'sweet instruction', to denote this deeper comic drama." Comedy is not a simple amusement or simple entertainment. Rather, “comedy is all about a serious human conflict. The passionate pursuit of love, ambition, socio-status, and money are age-old comic themes” (Robert, 2000:19). A popular Yoruba adage says, "When an issue goes beyond crying (tragedy), laughter (comedy) is the best means of expressing it." Comedy is, therefore, not inferior to tragedy. Rather, it is the higher degree of tragedy that was previously mentioned. Macdonald and Wanton (2007:60) have corroborated the aforementioned assertions and also established the fact that:

Livy, the Roman historian, reports that the earliest theatrical performances in Rome, known as the LudiScaenici, took place in 364 B.C. The LudiScaenici, part of a religious festival, sought the gods' protection against a recent plague. However, the Romans did not consider plays an act of worship, as the Greeks did, even though they occurred during religious festivals. As Roman and Greek cultures interacted more frequently, however, the Romans began to adopt more elements of Greek theatre.

Although the historicity of performances is conventionally Eurocentric, the link between comedic performances and religious and secular festivities is common in numerous cultures around the world. This makes it challenging to arrive at a single formalistic definition of comedy, but the functions of its different forms in cultures are very similar.

Stand-up Comedy: Definition(s)

There have been other arguments made that stand-up comedy is difficult to define and has many defining traits, forms, and identities. According to Sjobohm (2008:4), "Stand-up comedy can be a confusing term to explain, particularly since there is uniqueness in every stand-up act derived from the personality and particularities of each performer. " Some scholars believe stand-up comedy makes use of dialogue rather than monologue. However, this assumption has created a whole lot of controversies.

Stand-up comedy has not been the subject of as much scholarly research as other genres. Still, researchers who have attempted to define stand-up comedy agree that the distinctive feature of the comic subgenre is its performance component (Jason, 2000). Stand-up comedy is a conversation show, according to Ian (2008). This suggests an environment in which the audience the stand-up comic is speaking to is free to respond, participate, and engage. Sjobohm presented his views, in agreement with others, that:

Since there might not be a dialogue, in the sense of a mutual exchange of ideas between at least two persons, in this case between the comedian and the audience, the audience is there to listen and laugh, but they can also heckle, which is when they disrupt the act by mocking the comedian's failure to amuse them. The comedian might also address specific members of the audience, making them part of the act, usually as a target for jokes. Thus, a stand-up comedy act can be regarded as a dialogue, although with a very limited interaction between performer and audience. (2008:5)

Nwankwo (2014) characterizes stand-up comedy as a performance genre wherein a comic engages the audience with humorous narratives, musical acts, mime, and various entertainment forms, mostly aimed at eliciting laughter. Rao (2011) asserts that stand-up comedy, characterized as a solo performer's intentionally humorous presentation on stage before an audience, is gaining prominence in the contemporary media and entertainment sphere. The performance aspect inherent in stand-up comedy is encapsulated by this definition. It underscores the distinctiveness of the participating artist. Stand-up comedy is a genre in which the performer, referred to as a stand-up comedian, takes the stage and interacts directly with the audience. A stand-up comedian, until recently, was a solitary artist who entertained audiences by delivering humorous anecdotes on stage. Stand-up comedy can be characterized as a performing art and a social framework centred on the "production and consumption" of "humorous narratives". Mintz (1985) defines a stand-up comedy show as a venue where a solitary artist engages with an audience through comedic actions or straight humorous statements (Filani, 2015).

While "stand-up" comedy typically involves the performer standing before the audience, this is not a must, stand-up comedy is regarded as "an exaggerated representation of socio-cultural realities that emphasize the vices and shortcomings of society" (Idowu, 2017:35). He also underscores that the economic and cultural convergence and divergence of stand-up comedy are intrinsically connected to both personal and social environmental experiences. Stand-up comedy performances typically occur in comedy clubs, taverns, nightclubs, theatres, colleges, and neo-burlesques. Stand-up comedy is often commercially disseminated through television, DVD, CD, and the internet when not performed live. The audience's prompt feedback is crucial to the comedian's performance.

Employing Fairclough and Wodak's theories of ideology in discourse as a framework, Ajayi and Michael (2019) conducted a critical evaluation of the ideologies present in select Nigerian Stand-up Comedy routines (NSC). The objective was to showcase performances by both established and emerging Nigerian stand-up comedians by curating specific routines from previous Night of a Thousand Laughs (NTL) events. They asserted the discovery of two distinctive concepts in Nigerian stand-up comedy routines: the first pertains to the art of comedic performance, while the second relates to the sociocultural context of the nation.

Nneoma (2021) investigated the practical techniques employed by selected stand-up comedians to determine Nigerian Pidgin's status as a valid medium for humour creation and consumption. The study analyzed the pragmatic features of Nigerian pidgin in selected comedies to elucidate its use in generating humour and entertaining the audience, along with its patterns and selections. This aimed to reveal how Nigerian Pidgin embodies the many speech acts found in the plays. Its essence lay in its ability to convey the genuine significance of the statements made by the scrutinized comedians. This study examined the use of Nigerian Pidgin and the diverse speech acts represented by four Nigerian stand-up comedians: Basketmouth, I Go Dye, Bovi, and Ali Baba. Paul Grice's theory of conversational implication and John Searle's speech act theory were employed to examine the use of Nigerian pidgin by comedians and its underlying meanings. Nneoma's academic research focused on a specific aspect of the language of Nigerian stand-up comedy.

Ambrose's study, "Collective Beliefs as Script Triggers: A Case Study of Gordon's Comedy Performance" (2022), examines the linguistic techniques employed by Gordon throughout his performances. The essay argues that the Collective Beliefs as Script Triggers technique is a concept within social cognitive theory (SCTH) that encompasses interaction and meaning-making processes. The study argues that most of Gordons' unusual comic frameworks are based on theological themes that highlight Salvationism. Furthermore, it demonstrates how different script triggers—essentially, occurrences of authentic versus inauthentic speech—can be employed to examine humorous narratives. The study illustrates how comedy is conveyed through discordant scripts that the audience comprehends via shared ideas. Ambrose's essay examines the sources of inspiration for stand-up comedy in Nigeria.

Nwankwo (2021) emphasized two significant indigenous elements: "yabbing" and He asserts that comedians' narratives are shaped by regional joke trends, on one hand. Conversely, comedic performances mitigate offence and influence the audience's response to ridicule. The study provides extensive coverage of the industry by incorporating numerous examples of stand-up comedians. Osisanwo and Ilesanmi (2020) analyzed the use of humour in select Nigerian stand-up comedy to investigate the portrayal of class, gender, and ethnicity within these performances.

Adesina and Filani (2018) analysed the use of cultural assumptions and representations in Nigerian stand-up comedy, employing relevance theory to examine seven routines from seven distinct comedians. Nigerian stand-up comedians engage with culture by distorting stereotypes, expressing personal concepts, altering common knowledge, and influencing collective cultural representations. Nigerian stand-up comedians negotiate and define "contemporary culture" by

satirizing cultural representations and beliefs in their performances. As a result, Imo focused on the intersection of Nigerian stand-up comedy and culture.

Mensah et al. (2023) examined sexual jokes as ideological texts and rhetorical instruments that illustrate the tension between conservative and postmodern perspectives on sex and sexuality. They highlighted the subjects and innovative narratives of sexual humour employed by stand-up comedians to examine gender norms, sexual myths, sexual politics, and social paradoxes within a volatile socio-economic and political context. It highlights the subjects and innovative narratives. This study examines the sexual humour used by stand-up comedians to explore gender norms, sexual myths, sexual politics, and social paradoxes within a volatile sociopolitical and economic context.

Dungan (2019) examined comedy, specifically stand-up, with a socially conscious lens. He differentiated between stand-up aficionados and practitioners of the craft. He contends that, although most art has a societal message, stand-up comedy adopts a more direct method of articulating its values, as it features a solitary performer on stage delivering jokes and revealing personal insights, a viewpoint he finds dubious. Such an approach may lead some audience members to dissent from the comedian, and if they are really shocked by the content, they might even characterize the comedian as "offensive". Dungan analyzed the structure and substance of humour with a specific focus on its components.

Inter-media research focused on a specific aspect of the language of Nigerian stand-up comedy. Ambrose's essay (2022) examines the language method employed by Gordon in his performances. Stand-up comedy is the most contemporary iteration of popular dramatic entertainment in Nigeria, from a historical perspective. Initially, artists transitioned from the Yoruba-popular travelling theatre to celluloid. Nonetheless, home video supplanted celluloid owing to significant financial and technical exigencies, necessitating an elevation in popular culture. The economic success of home video culture catalysed the emergence of stand-up comedy in Nigeria, with Atunyota Alleluya Akpobome, well-known as Ali Baba, serving as the trailblazer. In Nigeria's cultural landscape, stand-up comedy has increasingly gained prominence as a performance genre.

The Concept of Text and Textuality

Textuality pertains to the characteristics of written language that render it suitable for literary analysis (Rhiney, 2010). Textuality involves the original words in both written and oral formats. A text serves as a medium for transmitting a message from the sender to the receiver, such as from the speaker to the listener, the writer to the reader, or the filmmaker to the viewer, with signs regulated by codes composed of rules and conventions that differ across societies (Taiwo, 2020). As stated by Scholte (1982) and referenced by Adesanya (2014, p. 64), "texts are communicative objects for scholars in the humanities." He further clarifies that writings express the shared interest of the humanities, given that humans are inherently text-producing beings. The discipline of humanities primarily engages with the production, analysis, interpretation, and assessment of texts. He asserts unequivocally that texts are not merely created randomly; instead, there are specific principles governing their production and interpretation.

Text is a complex and varied concept within the realms of literature and performance. The notion of text has been examined from many viewpoints by diverse theorists within the humanities. Among them are Barton and Carmen (2013), who investigated text through the humanities. The language, including digital text and practices, analyzing the relationship between online language and polyglotism; and Carter and Michael (2006), who thoroughly explored text from the standpoint of literary (written) and oral (spoken) English within the framework of authentic everyday conventional human conversation. Taiwo (2020), referencing Lotman (1981), contends that text constitutes literature replete with meanings, suggesting that a single text can provide numerous interpretations (p. 176). Text serves as a mechanism for understanding in literary works and the formulation of ideology. Eagleton (1981, as referenced in Newton 1979) asserts that multiple categories of texts exist. Walker examines the modernist dichotomy between text and performance, highlighting its correlation with the professional division of oral English from English literature, which fosters a perception of literature and performance as antagonistic (Walker, 2003, 150). Danesi (2010) asserts that the term 'text' encompasses various forms, including conversations, letters, speeches, poems, myths, novels, television programs, paintings, scientific theories, and musical compositions (Online). Danesi's submission is pertinent and significant to the topic of this research. Richards maintains that a live performance constitutes 'a multi-layered text', examining themes, symbolism, imagery, conversation, creative writing, and poetic devices as layers of meaning within the performance. (2018)

Several theorists have classified 'text' as a concept across various disciplines. For instance, the major focus of literary theory is basically on:

...literary texts – novels, essays, stories, and poems. Legal scholars focus on legal texts such as laws, contracts, decrees, and regulations. Cultural theorists work with a wide variety of texts, including those that may not typically be the subject of studies, such as advertisements, signage, instruction manuals, and other ephemera. (Nordquist, 2019).

It is important to point out that 'text' and 'form' are distinct concepts. 'Form' refers to the physical substance, whereas 'text' denotes the words (content) within that substance. Furthermore, due to the prevailing technological dynamism, particularly in social media, the characteristics of text increasingly encompass symbols, such as emojis, which are linked to social media communication methods. The notion that texts are relatively stable and immutable is no longer tenable. As the capabilities of new media evolve, they become more adaptable. Their multimodality and interaction are expanding. The intertextuality of online writings is prominent, with intricate connections between texts as users engage with and reference other online works (Barton and Lee, 2013). This study analyses the notion of text through the lens of oral performances, using selected live performances of Ali Baba's stand-up comedy as case studies. Nordquist (2019) posits that every written or spoken language sample, ranging from complex works such as books or legal documents to simpler forms like cereal box labels or email content, qualifies as a text. Online. Text can be defined as the original words of information, whether written, printed, or spoken, as opposed to those that are summarized or paraphrased.

Oral text constitutes a method of spoken communication. It is a medium for the verbal expression of thoughts, emotions, opinions, and moods and a method of conveying information using spoken

language or oral presentations. Oral performances include storytelling, poetry recitation, singing, acting, and stand-up comedy. In contrast to literary text, which is primarily composed for readers, oral text serves as a kind of entertainment delivered either live to an audience or indirectly via screen. Despite being oral in nature, Ali Baba's performances had intrinsic literary elements, leading to their transcription for this study. Ali Baba's speech is imbued with subtext and symbolic language and reflects the reality of human existence. They possess a distinctive poetic quality, hence warranting critical inquiry. It is indisputable that Ali Baba has delivered numerous performances over the course of almost three decades. The texts presented here are meticulously chosen, as they encapsulate the entirety of his performances throughout the years.

Theme as a Literary Concept

Each literary work possesses a significant intellectual concept that arises from the exploration of its content. This significant concept can be termed as a theme. The theme is commonly identified as the principal concept in a narrative, whether written or spoken. Griffith (2010) asserts that themes are concepts derived from literary works—encompassing all genres, not solely fiction—that we apply to life and our reality. In most instances, theme pertains to the statement of the human condition or the authenticity that clarifies human behaviour. It represents the writer's (in literary works) or performer's (in oral performances) articulation of their social and psychological perceptions, worldview, and belief system. The theme thus constitutes the principal concept within a narrative. The author's preoccupation constitutes the narrative's message. The theme offers the viewer insights into the character's struggles, endeavours, discoveries, and emotions as they arise from these elements. An author articulates their perspectives on life through themes. Therefore, it is sufficient to assert that, as posited by Bergson, Ali Baba's jokes elicit not mere delight but contemplative laughter.

In addition, theme is the cohesive and unifying element that makes a literary work or performance meaningfully complete and satisfying. Wei Jing (2015:178), citing Halliday (2014), asserts that theme is:

the point of departure for the message...the element the speaker selects for 'grounding'. It is the peg on which the message is hung, and it can be recognised by the fact that it is in the first position. The theme guides the listener/reader towards the upcoming message and establishes a structure for its interpretation. The theme typically contains familiar, old, or given information that has already been mentioned somewhere in the text or is shared or mutual knowledge in the immediate context.

The above definition affirms that a theme is a significant aspect in a literary work or performance, often universal or known to the reader or listener. According to Scopa Sally (2017), a theme in literature is a universal concept, lesson, or message that the text elaborates upon. Universality is an essential element of literary themes; these themes represent concepts that extend beyond the specific characters and events in a narrative, instead articulating broader truths about the human condition that resonate with readers in their experiences. The characters' conversation, thoughts, actions, development, beliefs, worldview, and dynamism throughout the narrative exemplify the topic.

Kang (2016) asserts that a theme underpins the message, encompasses content aligned with the textual development process, and facilitates the formation of a coherent discourse. A literary text or oral performance lacking relevant thematic focus is essentially an inarticulate communication. In addition to character, language, spectacle, plot, setting, and style, theme constitutes a fundamental element that underpins any literary work or oral presentation. A key aspect of a theme is its capacity to explore universal, socio-historical, psycho-cultural, spiritual, and philosophical concepts that can be deciphered.

The theme's truth is inherent and can usually be confirmed by the reader (for literary texts) or the listener (for oral performances). Therefore, a topic is inherently the product of well-crafted text or a well-organised speech presentation. Themes can be classified as either main or minor. The main theme of a story or speech is the main idea that the author or speaker keeps coming back to, while the minor theme includes smaller ideas that support or highlight the main idea. The role of topic in any literary or oral text is crucial; it contributes artistic worth and enriches the contextual meaning of the text or performance.

Texts of Ali Baba's Comedy

Henri Bergson's theoretical propositions clearly influence the textual composition of Ali Baba's stand-up comedy. Bergson, affirmed by Brain (2004), posits that the right to laugh is inherent to individuals who possess the ability to laugh and to be the subject of laughter. Consequently, Ali Baba's humour, which is universally relatable yet distinct in specific cultural contexts, aligns with the principles of the philosophy of laughter. His humour is propelled by the universality of laughing and its cultural nuances. Ali Baba commenced his professional stand-up comedy career in 1993 with the establishment of his firm, Ali Baba Hicuppuray 3rd, and consequently, the material for his stand-up comedy originates from that same year. He commenced by making appearances at events. He was allotted opportunities to perform at events. He commenced his professional career by organizing corporate events and appearing on television alongside celebrities such as Danladi Bako, Patrick Doyle, Charlie Boy, Sunny Irabo, Mani Onumonmu, and Bisi Olatilo. Additionally, he made intermittent appearances on radio shows (Nigeria Galleria, 2017: Online). Unfortunately, his event attendance was not digitally documented, reflecting the standard practices of Nigerian recordkeeping for artistic endeavours.

He commenced his Ali Baba January 1st Concerts in 2015, which were professionally digitally recorded. Regrettably, producer Bunmi Davies suffered the loss of more than thirty hard drives due to a burglary at his business premises. He stated in 2020, "I regret to inform you that we no longer possess the 2015 version." In 2015, I had a problem at my workplace. One of my employees pilfered more than thirty hard drives. I misplaced several tapes of my personal shows. The programme, Stand-up Nigeria, was conducted during that same year" (Interview). The researched texts of Ali Baba's comedy comprise deliberately chosen works that encapsulate his entire career thus far and are suitable for critical analysis within the theoretical framework of Bergson's theory of laughing. The writings are categorized into three groups: Ali Baba's Local Guest Appearances, International Guest Appearances, and Personal Shows. The events encompass Opa Williams' Nite of a Thousand Laughs, Lafup's Circus Show, MC PC's Ali Baba Shuts Down America, and the Ali Baba January 1st Concert Series.

Ali Baba, a distinguished Nigerian comedian, utilizes a broad spectrum of comedic techniques and literary elements in his performances, enthralling audiences with his sharp wit, humour, and perceptive comments on diverse aspects of Nigerian society. Upon meticulous analysis of Ali Baba's comedy, several essential elements emerge, including language devices, cultural references, social satire, and performing style. Central to Ali Baba's comedic arsenal are a variety of linguistic tactics, including wordplay, puns, and satire, which he adeptly employs. His linguistic prowess enables him to create humorous situations, frequently utilizing Nigerian Pidgin English and colloquial terms that profoundly connect with his audience. Through adept wordplay and linguistic finesse, Ali Baba skillfully constructs jokes that are both accessible and very amusing, crossing linguistic barriers and connecting with broad audiences.

Furthermore, Ali Baba's humour is closely linked to cultural references that accurately portray the subtleties of Nigerian society. He derives inspiration from quotidian events, cultural conventions, and societal trends, enriching his performances with compelling anecdotes and insightful remarks that profoundly relate to the daily reality of his audience. Ali Baba's cultural commentary, whether jokingly questioning Nigerian politics, adeptly negotiating familial complications, or satirizing pressing societal issues, acts as a reflected mirror that accurately encapsulates the multidimensional nature of Nigerian life. An example of his text in one of his comedies is captured below:

Do you know that a Yoruba man and his car are one? They are not separate entities either. That is why you hear a Yoruba man say “tyre mi tibaje”, “My tyre is terrible”, not the car’s tyreooo. Also, if you hit a Yoruba man and he is telling the police, “O gba mi ni”, “He hit me” (IDI, 59, Male, Ali Baba 2020)

As a result, after careful review, it has been determined that the text written by Ali Baba truly represents the real experiences and situations of the Yoruba person, showing how they express and share deep feelings through epitaphs.

In addition to humour, Ali Baba's comedy frequently encompasses implicit social criticism, questioning established standards and inciting critical thinking. Utilizing his comic perspective, he tackles significant themes including corruption, gender dynamics, and socio-economic inequalities, illuminating the follies and injustices present in Nigerian culture. Through the amalgamation of humour and social commentary, Ali Baba not only provides entertainment but also stimulates discourse on critical societal topics, promoting awareness and dialogue. By integrating humour as a medium for social critique, Ali Baba skillfully traverses the domain of comedy, utilizing it to illuminate the complex dynamics of Nigerian culture. His comic performances provide a medium for him to examine and contest societal standards, provoking critical thinking among his audience. Through his perceptive observations and incisive analysis, he explores topics such as corruption, gender dynamics, and socio-economic inequities, elucidating the intricacies and contradictions inherent in Nigerian culture.

Ali Baba's captivating stage presence, flawless timing, and vigorous delivery enhance the enchanting quality of his performing style. Upon taking the stage, he effortlessly captivates the audience with his colourful stories and infectious energy. His adept manipulation of humorous timing facilitates a seamless shift between periods of intense humour and profound contemplation,

guaranteeing sustained audience engagement throughout his performances. According to Ali Baba who describes his performances:

as akin to a brand, something that people can instantly recognize upon first sight. For instance, someone might hear a song and instantly recognize it as 'Fela'. Well, I do not have one because I appeal to all classes and textures of society, so I refuse to be pigeonholed. For instance, you probably will hear a comedian speak, and you are like, 'This one talks only pidgin; I don't. I could speak pidgin today, speak Yoruba tomorrow, speak Igbo in another two events, and then manage to blend all of them at another event properly as long as I know that the audience is made up of (IDI, 59, Male, Ali Baba 2020)

In summation, the texts of Ali Baba's comedy exemplify his exceptional talent as a comedian and social commentator, as he adeptly and ingeniously navigate the nuances of several languages. Ogoanah and Ojo (2018) assert that throughout his routines, Ali Baba utilizes a higher frequency of deictic gestures, possibly because his comedic narratives predominantly focus on the imitation of characters that extensively deploy such gestures. Utilizing his linguistic skill, cultural understanding, social commentary, and engaging performing style, he creates comedy that goes beyond simple amusement, providing audiences with insight into the complex and subtle truths of Nigerian society. His capacity to transcend limits, contest conventions, and evoke laughter while also stimulating profound reflection and substantive discourse on matters of societal importance unequivocally positions him as a comedy innovator. Ali Baba's humorous talents persist in influencing the Nigerian comedy scene, creating a lasting impact on the business and reinforcing his status as a visionary entertainer. The attributes of the jokes predominantly align with the three sub-theories of laughter: relief, incongruity, and superiority.

Conclusion

Stand-up comedy is a socio-cultural practice that must creatively and humorously propagate culture. Stand-up comedy is primarily a form of artistic expression, specifically within the performing arts, and it must fulfill the essential functions of art, including entertainment, education, and information dissemination. For stand-up comedy to be valuable, practitioners must amalgamate talent with intentionality. This study suggests that the narrative of stand-up comedy in Nigeria is significantly inadequate without acknowledging Atunyota Alleluya Akpobome (Ali Baba). Ali Baba's emergence in the Nigerian stand-up comedy landscape transformed both the form and substance of the genre, prompting a reevaluation of societal attitudes toward the art and the performer. Stand-up comedy in Nigeria serves as a significant medium for awareness, personal economic emancipation, and national development.

Textual analysis of Alibaba's work reveals that he uses semantic codes that are inherently Nigerian. His delivery reflects the linguistic particularity of English in Nigeria and also mixtures like Pidgin, Urhobo, Ibo and sometimes Hausa. The use of slang in his comedy also reinforces the in-group identity that characterizes the creation and consumption of textual products. There are linguistic and semiotic links between the content of Ali Baba's comedy and the social imagination of his audience.

Correlatedly, his narratives often humorously treat scenarios that have sociological significance to the realities of being Nigerian. The thematic content of his comedic performances is consistently reflective of urban Nigerian cities like Lagos, Warri, Abuja, Ibadan, Jos, etc., cities that are often venues for his stand-up comedy shows. So, there is a symbiotic relationship between the texts and themes in the content of Ali Baba's stand-up comedy performances. He skillfully uses the language(s) of his jokes to adequately convey his observation of his cultural environment. The result places the contents of Ali Baba's comedy as an ingenious body of texts revealing the relationship between language and culture.

Recommendations

Ali Baba's standardized stand-up comedy clearly establishes it as a distinct genre within the dramatic arts. It is therefore recommended that stand-up comedy, informed by the dramatic subtleties developed by Ali Baba, be incorporated into the curriculum as a distinct course in the performing arts and, if feasible, as a specialty. It is advisable that, due to the potential of comedy to enhance the national economy and augment foreign exchange reserves, the Nigerian government should establish a conducive atmosphere for its development. The government should offer financial assistance to its practitioners to foster and maintain originality in this field. An academic structure such as this will make it easier to utilize the findings in the study of stand-up comedy's textuality in teaching the actual praxis and composition of stand-up comedy.

This work recommends further and more localized studies of textuality in the oeuvres of top stand-up comedians in Nigeria. As an art form, stand-up comedy has exerted a lot of influence on the other arts and the cultural economy of the country as a whole. Lately, it has found dramatic expressions in skits posted on social media platforms. It is a popular and predominantly oral art that can yield a lot of semantic and sociological information on contemporary Nigeria. Textual analysis of stand-up comedy will trace character types, linguistic genealogy, thematic similarities and other textual influences of this art on new, evolving comic arts in Nigeria.

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